



DEVAL L. PATRICK  
GOVERNOR

TIMOTHY P. MURRAY  
LT. GOVERNOR

MARY ELIZABETH HEFFERNAN  
SECRETARY

*The Commonwealth of Massachusetts*  
*Executive Office of Public Safety and Security*  
*Department of Fire Services*

*P.O. Box 1025 ~ State Road*

*Stow, Massachusetts 01775*

*(978) 567~3100 Fax: (978) 567~3121*

*[www.mass.gov/dfs](http://www.mass.gov/dfs)*



STEPHEN D. COAN  
STATE FIRE MARSHAL

For Immediate Release: November 25, 2012

Contact: Jennifer Mieth, (978) 567-3381

**Fire Officials Release Cause of Springfield Explosion**

State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan, Springfield Mayor Domenic J. Sarno, Springfield Fire Commissioner Joseph Conant, and state Energy Commissioner Rick Sullivan gave a brief press conference today to release the source of the fuel and the activities that led to Friday's natural gas explosion at 453 Worthington Street, Springfield.

Mayor Sarno indicated that the Columbia Gas Company has been extremely cooperative in the investigation and has conducted extensive testing in the neighborhood of the explosion and has found no leaks.

Mayor Sarno said, "Columbia Gas has demonstrated again on-going cooperation during another disaster that has impacted the City of Springfield. I am pleased that they have pledged their full cooperation with all city and state investigatory officials." Columbia Gas will be opening a temporary claims center on Monday in room 222 at City Hall from 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The mayor extended his thanks and appreciation to the first responders who put their lives on the line every day to protect the residents of Springfield. Mayor Sarno said, "Their quick action prevented this terrible incident from being worse. I also want to thank the residents of Springfield for their ongoing patience and cooperation as officials continue to clear up the site."

Commissioner Conant said, "The firefighters did an excellent job evacuating the area which certainly prevented additional civilian injuries and saved many lives." He added, "Twelve of the fourteen firefighters on the scene were injured. All have been treated and released but several will face a long recovery road."

State Fire Marshal Coan said, "This incident clearly demonstrates there is no such thing as a routine fire call. Each and every time the fire truck leaves the building they must expect the unexpected. The training and professionalism of these firefighters saved many lives."

*Administrative Services • Division of Fire Safety*  
*Hazardous Materials Response • Massachusetts Firefighting Academy*

The investigation has been jointly conducted by the Springfield Arson & Bomb Squad, State Police in the Office of the State Fire Marshal and staff from the Department of Public Utilities' Pipeline Safety Division.

The investigative team has been systematically and methodically examining the infrastructure as well as interviewing personnel who were on scene. Eyewitness accounts from firefighters, Columbia Gas Company staff and one particular Springfield Police officer have been extremely helpful in reconstructing the events of Friday afternoon.

Investigators have identified two separate events. The first is what brought gas employees to the scene in the first place and the second is what caused the explosion. Investigators have determined the source of the fuel and the activities that led to the explosion. The Department of Public Utilities will be continuing its investigation into the specific activities that led to the explosion.

There was a report of a gas odor inside the building at 453 Worthington Street on Friday to which the local gas utility responded. The joint investigation is still looking to see if they can determine the source of that odor given that the building no longer exists.

By methodically examining and testing different segments of the gas infrastructure investigators were able to conclude that there was no leak of gas from the main in the street. They have determined that human error as opposed to a fault of the gas infrastructure provided the fuel for the explosion. Exactly whose human error will be the subject of the Department of Public Utilities' on-going investigation.

The gas company employee smelled gas at the threshold of the building, but metered no gas inside. He began to search outside the building using a metal probe to make holes in order to measure gas. His examination appears to have been an appropriate distance from where older markings on the sidewalk indicated where the gas line was. However, the markings were incorrect and his metal probe inadvertently punctured the high-pressure gas line right at the foundation of the building.

Investigators recovered the section of pipe that clearly shows the hole in the pipe that matches the metal probe. This hole was right at the foundation of the building on the sidewalk side.

At that point he called the fire department and for the gas company to shut off the gas. The fire department evacuated the area, which certainly saved many lives. The investigative team believes that the gas from the leak entered the building around the pipe and at some point reached the correct explosive level of gas and air, which was ignited by any of many possible ignition sources inside the building. Past investigations have shown there are too many possible ignition sources in these cases to pinpoint one, but the most important information is the source of the fuel.

Investigators expect to finish the scene examination today.

From here on, the Department of Public Utilities will be taking the lead in the next phase of the investigation.